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Does the device a learner uses, affect their interaction with the online learning platform?

Student Dissertation

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WED: Does the device a learner uses, affect their interaction with the online learning platform? (Matt Endean)

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<http://h818blog.wordpress.com/>

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[Matt Endean](#)

30 December 2016

Working as a learning in a distance based education system can at times be a hard challenge. The advent of MOOC's (Massive Open Online Courses) which have seen a huge rise in availability and participation, has forced education curriculum designers to re-think how they design their course content and how to make best use of the many new online tools.

However this change in presentation from traditional paper based courses to online based learning, does require the learner to have access to the internet and an internet enabled device. There is now a massive range of devices within which the learner can choose to access the online learning content. This presents the online content creator with an issue, how does the type of device a learner uses, affect their interaction with the online learning platform.

There are two issues here in action, the first is a more technical issue can the learner fully access and interact with the learning platform and engage in discussions with fellow students. The second one is based around learner motivation.

If the first issue presents the learner with a technical difficulty then it is likely to affect the second issue in question learner motivation. These two could be seen to be closely interlinked.

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OU H818 'The Networked Practitioner' Online Conference 2017

If we look at the first issue, we can see that Kukulska-Hulme found that :-

It is possible to claim that the devices learners use are hardly relevant; what is important is the notion of mobility and the construction of learning conversations in that process. Any discussion focusing on the primacy of technology is then liable to be perceived as a techno-centric perspective on education. However, anyone who becomes involved in mobile learning will quickly notice that, at the present time, it really matters which devices learners are using.

If we presume that the learner is experiencing some form of technical interaction difficulties then we can reasonably assume that this is likely to have a negative effect on the motivation of the learner.

Learner motivation is a real issue for all learning platforms online or not, however the online learning platform has additional issues for the course designer to deal with. Firstly the learner is nearly always operating on their own, this means that for effective online learning to occur there is a need for an effective online learning community which engages with all learners. Secondly this needs to work on a number of different platforms and devices, which learners are likely to have access to.

Today there are multiple types of device a learner could use to access their online learning, these include mobile phones, tablets, laptops, and other internet enabled devices like games consoles or even 'Smart' TV's.

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My research will continue to look into the issues surrounding the ideas behind how the type of device a learner use affect their interaction with the learning platform, and therefore their levels of interaction with the learning materials provided.

For more information about this please view my conference poster about this at :-

<https://magic.piktochart.com/output/19042024-h818-poster>

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[Jude Toasland](#)

3:18pm 29 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

An interesting topic, particularly as I have juggled a laptop and a tablet over the course of this OU module and found some aspects impossible to use the tablet for, and therefore delaying my study when I was travelling. You mention your blog in the poster - is the plan to link this here too or is that just for the H818 audience?



[Danny Ball](#)

8:52pm 30 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Matt,

Sorry, I must have missed your poster on OpenStudio! This is a very interesting topic and was actually discussed at a Blackboard Mobile Users' Group I attended in January, you can see some of the Tweets from the session here: [Bb Mobile User notes](#).

Like you, I have found it extremely difficult to respond to forum posts using mobile devices, which normally results in the formatting going all over the place. As a result of this, I often find myself using my mobile devices for read-only engagement or to quickly check something. I then return to my laptop where I can engage fully with the materials and discussions.

In relation to the specific challenge you pose, one of the key issues raised in the mobile users' group is whether content placed within virtual learning environments should be designed primarily for access on mobile devices, even if this means removing or avoiding multimedia content that cannot be supported/accessed on mobile devices. The problem with this approach is that content design is taking a techno-centric perspective, rather than considering the overarching pedagogy. Additionally, if students only ever access a VLE via their mobile device they are only receiving a very limited view of the resources provided by the University due to either the mobile devices not supporting the content or this content is simply hidden due to mobile apps only displaying content which is directly placed within a course/module site on the VLE.

Therefore, should Universities and other educational providers focus on making content fully accessible on mobile devices as the primary design criteria, or should there be a greater focus on the completion of activities? I.e. Rather than consuming content on the go, should mobile devices act as an access point for students to communicate with other students via tools such as discussion boards. Additionally, how can we as educators make better usage of the rich functionality smartphones bring such as video recording, geotagging, the ability to live stream videos etc. Surely, such uses would provide a more pedagogically rich experience, rather than just focusing on the consumption of content on the go?

Danny



[Julie Skeats](#)

10:02pm 1 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Matt. This is a really interesting topic as I work with teenagers who seem glued to their smartphones. I have had students who have managed to complete their task better using their smartphone than using the PC. They were quicker typing up their work on the smartphone than they were on the PC. Many schools don't allow students access to these devices as they can be a distraction as the students are distracted by social media and texting each other. Are you focusing on a particular age group, or looking in general at interaction with the online learning platform?



[Dr Susan Morris](#)

12:17pm 2 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Matt,

Smart presentation video using [biteable.com](#). Good job!

Publishing of educational resources to multi-platforms is done often without adequate testing with learners. In OU STEM this isn't the case and yet there remains 'glitches' that occur in presentation that really make it tricky for learners because they often don't 'know' what they are missing to complain about it. Our Animal Physiology Laboratory is a real time naturalistic experimental of device issues each year.

It reminds me of doing A Level Maths and Statistics 30 years ago when both the Exam Board and the school 'told' learners the manufacturer and model to buy. I raise that because the device issue is the start it then brings browser issues with operation.

Looking forward to your presentation, Susan



[Mary Howell](#)

1:21pm 4 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Matt A really thought provoking poster and topic. Like you, Jude and Danny I have been moving between devices and I am often caught between - it's easy to pick up my iPad and respond, but then stuff disappears, gets posted twice - general frustrations. Will there be an output of your work? For example top tips or recommendations?



[angela bonehill](#)

7:04pm 5 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Matt,

I can reiterate what everyone else has said about devices, I use a tablet, a laptop and a desktop, lots of pen drives swapping to a fro, sharing with colleagues and family. For example, if I'm doing tutorials, I need the laptop, the tablet is quick for searching and researching but difficult to print from or save things.....

Most of the students I work with have smart phones and since starting their degrees they have been developing their laptop skills, moreover and interestingly pupils in schools do most of their work by hand and all school exams are still handwritten, unless there is a specific need.

Looking forward to listening to your presentation



[Matt Endean](#)

4:20pm 7 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Thanks to all for your comments, it has proved to be a popular topic and one which a lot of people can relate to and have direct experience of.



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

2:52pm 15 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Matt

Please find below the main questions and comments from your live presentation. It's up to you how to answer them, whether you wish to group them, or whether you wish to point to an answer already given above, for example.

Best wishes

Simon

- ▶ Social isolation can be a big barrier to learning
- ▶ Important point - that knowing some software does not necessarily transfer to other platforms
- ▶ Universities are also guilty of this by using technologies which are not necessarily used in industries outside of the education sector

- ▶ they get all caught up in the cleverness of their new-thingness, as a previous speaker, maybe Danny?, said
- ▶ I gave up trying to carry out OU study using mobile devices. Great for read-only engagement, but trying to interact and complete tasks can be difficult
- ▶ I would like to hear more about the wider pedagogic issues around text-communication based learning. I am thinking about this in terms of how *we* tend to think of participation in learning in terms of discussion (often as a first port of call in many disciplines). Thanks
- ▶ Many issues round platforms are about how the browser interprets the scripts differently.
- ▶ That will be interesting the technology v learning issues
- ▶ Supporting learners and practitioners using personal devices can be very difficult. I find this often in my own role
- ▶ OU computing modules do have this problem - that people think they can learn computing on unsuitable devices.
- ▶ This is especially the case with my Access young students - it does not occur to them that their phone is not the answer to everything - sorry for all that double-negative stuff
- ▶ Some Universities do publish a 'statement of compatibility' reference mobile tech. Useful.
- ▶ Should the platform designers do more work on making all devices accessible with there platforms?
- ▶ The OU platforms have improved eg students can successfully ccess ou live from phones now. Perhaps it is a matter of time and trying to keep up withnew technology. I wonder if voice based technology would enable comments to be added more easily
- ▶ Ha ha - I have been experimenting with voice based tech recently - see the You tube video about Glaswegians using a voice activated lift for more insight into this!



[Matt Endean](#)

9:41pm 15 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Thanks to everyone for all your questions here and during the conference

- ▶ Social isolation can be a big barrier to learning

Indeed it can, and is a big issue with online / distance learning. If learners struggle to interact due to the device they are using this will only make the issue worse...

- ▶ Important point - that knowing some software does not necessarily transfer to other platforms

Most users now know how to use software, rather than the skill of having to 'learn how to use software' like we had to in the past. Perhaps new software is too helpful?

- ▶ Universities are also guilty of this by using technologies which are not necessarily used in industries outside of the education sector

I was surprised when I started studying with the OU by their use of their own or bespoke

software. This gives the tutors a lot of control, but gives the learners issues with accessing it.

- ▶ they get all caught up in the cleverness of their new-thingness, as a previous speaker, maybe Danny?, said

Guilty as charged! We have all been there and it is easy to be taken in by trying to get the latest whizzy idea to work. This also takes up the cognitive load of the learner. Perhaps they should be restricted or removed by the tutor?

- ▶ I gave up trying to carry out OU study using mobile devices. Great for read-only engagement, but trying to interact and complete tasks can be difficult

I would agree with that, I still use my iPad but mostly reading and some research.

- ▶ I would like to hear more about the wider pedagogic issues around text-communication based learning. I am thinking about this in terms of how *we* tend to think of participation in learning in terms of discussion (often as a first port of call in many disciplines). Thanks

I would agree nearly all online learning platforms rely on text as a format of interaction. Vlogging (as covered by a fellow student) is relatively new and does get around these barriers.

- ▶ Many issues round platforms are about how the browser interprets the scripts differently.

Yes, this is usually the root cause of the issues.

- ▶ That will be interesting the technology v learning issues

Thanks – it has proved to be an interesting and popular topic.

- ▶ Supporting learners and practitioners using personal devices can be very difficult. I find this often in my own role

Thanks, nearly everyone I speak to about this can cite their own experiences of the issues here.

- ▶ OU computing modules do have this problem - that people think they can learn computing on unsuitable devices.

I think this comes back to what I covered at the end, where tutors / learning providers should do real world testing of their platforms and then given honest feedback on what devices can and can't be used i.e. iPads will work, but you will struggle to do these things...

- ▶ This is especially the case with my Access young students - it does not occur to them that their phone is not the answer to everything - sorry for all that double-negative stuff

This comes down to teachers needing to teach students about the skills of using the 'right tool for the job' i.e. short film for a Vlog use your phone. Writing a reply on a learning

platform use a PC. But making this choice takes both experience and knowledge.

- ▶ Some Universities do publish a 'statement of compatibility' reference mobile tech. Useful.

See my above answer, about this.

- ▶ Should the platform designers do more work on making all devices accessible with there platforms?

For platforms used by a wide audience then yes, but I would prefer them to be honest about which platforms do and don't work and then allow learners to make an informed choice.

- ▶ The OU platforms have improved eg students can successfully access ou live from phones now. Perhaps it is a matter of time and trying to keep up with new technology. I wonder if voice based technology would enable comments to be added more easily

Good to know the new look platform works with mobile devices, I haven't tried recently. Perhaps if this is true then the OU should inform us of these changes? To pick up the other point yes of course there will always be a lag behind new technologies and learning platforms catching up. However devices like iPads (tablets) have been around for a relatively long time now....

- ▶ Ha ha - I have been experimenting with voice based tech recently - see the You tube video about Glaswegians using a voice activated lift for more insight into this!

I tried using voice command in my car... it was not successful! I think this technology needs a lot of work before this could be of a real value in teaching.

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